

February 28, 2016

Dr. Thomas Adams, Executive Director  
Instructional Quality Commission  
Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division (CFIRD)  
California Department of Education  
1430 N Street, Room 3207 Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Dr. Adams,

I write to offer a few points that might help elucidate the big picture and what is at stake with the Indian history portions of the new HSS draft given the complex and detailed suggestions made by several groups. Since my last submission to you in October 2015, I have reviewed other submissions given to you, including those by Prof. Bajpai and Acharya Arumugaswami and Mr. Tushar Pandya, and the somewhat puzzling ones offered by South Asia faculty led by Prof. Kamala Visweswaran. In the light of all of these, and my own detailed suggestions, I wish to share the following observations.

It is quite clear, despite variations in minutiae of language and phrase, that several scholars, parents, and Hindu American community leaders have asked just one thing of you: which is to ensure that this truly ugly episode in the history of America's fight against discrimination comes to an end, and Hindus can stop being objectified, vilified and condescended to by the ghosts of a long-gone colonial and racist past.

While I am sure you have every intention to do so, I also understand the challenges you have faced given the peculiar resistance that has been offered against these changes because of an entrenched and defensive attitude among some university professors wedded to an old worldview whose credibility is rapidly being chipped away by new discoveries and arguments. It is only a matter of time before the history of Hindus is decolonized in academia in the same manner that the story of Native Americans, African Americans, and other minority communities has been done. For now, you are in the position of making sure that the poison of pseudo-science and myth that has lingered so far does not continue to infest the minds of another generation of young Californians.

We Indian Americans may not have been made to sit at the back of the bus, but we are, today, being told to sit at the back of the class, year after year, subject to the taunts and lies of our history books. This must change.

There are on the whole just three basic facts that need to be recognized, and need to guide your final editorial decisions. I restate the main arguments here with reference to claims



and counterclaims in the various submissions to you so your minds are clear and undistracted by the heavy reading burden we have all placed on you. These are just the facts you should bear in mind:

- 1) India exists
- 2) Hinduism exists
- 3) Hinduism's core ideas, practices, texts, commentaries, and institutions are not reducible to caste and gender discrimination.

#### 1) India exists

You are familiar no doubt with how in the aftermath of colonialism and decolonization, several groups of people have struggled to reject the offensive and oppressive names given to them by the colonial discourse. You might recall how hard African Americans have struggled to throw off the names that were routinely used to demean them as a people. Indian Americans are quite frankly feeling the same way with the rabid insistence by some philosophically far-out academicians to insist on calling them "South Asians" instead. By all means, one is free to identify as a South Asian where appropriate. But if supposedly learned scholars make it sound like a crime to say one is an Indian, or talk about Indian history, or ancient India, then there is something seriously wrong with knowledge and attitude. History books have for far too long denied the integrity and significance of India in world history (what did Columbus go looking for after all, "South Asia"?). When you begin your revisions, please remember: you should not be making the Indus-Saraswati Valley lesson seem like an exception to a vast, uninhabited, "terra nullis" – and you should not be perpetuating the old colonial myth of Hinduism as having "invaded" India at all. Children should feel the presence, integrity and continuity of India and the Indian people from the first line they read in their history books, and not be left with a vague feeling that neither the Harappans, nor the Vedic Hindus, were somehow disconnected to the Hindu Americans of today. Children should be taught to respect the existence of a people and a land they have lived in for thousands of years; and approach the two oldest legacies of their civilization accurately, and as the fountainhead of the India that we have today. If the people of Western and Northern Europe could claim a religion from the people of Western Asia as their civilizational fountainhead, why is it so difficult to accept that the people of India today view their ancient philosophies and civilizations in much the same way. Imagine if Irish American students read in their books that Ireland never existed, or Muslim American students were taught in class that Islam was not even a religion... it is a terrifying existential denial no child must be exposed to.



### Hinduism exists

As one of the letters to you from the Uberoi Foundation has logically pointed out, over seven hundred million people in India checked the box marked “Hindu” in the 2011 census. Does the voice of the people matter more or the mere delusions of a small cult in the ivory tower that mistakes the philosophical questioning of categories in the classroom for real-world existential claims? It should be quite clear to you that there has been a desperate and pathetic attempt in academia to project a fantastic notion that either Hinduism was never “organized” till the 13<sup>th</sup> century, or even that Hinduism is not “organized” enough to be called Hinduism even today! This is a delusion that stems from the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial narratives on India written by motivated and racially-biased Indologists from Germany and England. If you believe that Hinduism was brought to India by a small group of invading horsemen as recently as 1500 BCE, you will no doubt also believe that there is no connection at all between the different gods and goddesses are worshipped in pretty much the same forms from one far end of the subcontinent to the other. Your final narrative, I hope, will purge any drop of doubt or aspersion on the existence or integrity of Hinduism, or of its deep and millennia-old connection to the landscape of India (I do hope you have seen Diana Eck’s *India: A Sacred Geography*, as I had earlier suggested). You should respect the reality of millions of living Hindus, and freely use the word “Hindu” where appropriate instead of ludicrous colonial era racist constructs like “Aryans” and even more ludicrous neo-colonial academic fantasies that deny the existence of Hinduism.

### Hinduism’s core ideas are not reducible to caste and gender discrimination

Traditional Vedic scholars (scholars who have studied the Vedas within the framework of living philosophical traditions in centuries-old religious institutions known as *peethams* and *mathas* – and not Eurocentric colonial philologists who study multiple mistranslations of Sanskrit words like dead relics that is) respectfully do not claim starting dates for the Vedas or for the philosophy we now call Hinduism. It is an ancient sensibility, and while modern historians in India work around it to offer various theories on their origins, it is clear that the 19<sup>th</sup> century fantasies about the Vedic people having invaded India in 1500 BCE are no longer accepted by anyone but the most entrenched ideologues. In any case, what traditional Vedic scholars might tell you is this: there has been an incredibly complex philosophy which has been constantly debated, commented on, practiced, for several hundred years now in India. And at the heart of this philosophy is a discourse about life, language, meaning, nature, energy, creation, transformation, dissolution, and renewal. Hinduism must be approaching at the most fundamental level as a living cosmology, then an ethically concerned social and political philosophy, expressed in a myriad of vibrant and diverse practices, and only then, if at all, with ideas that arguably had a bearing on social hierarchies (and, if and only if, other religions are also critiqued with the same proportion and intensity for their implications for causing

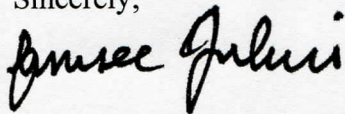


hierarchies, exclusions, genocides and holocausts). I strongly urge you to read Tushar Pandya's statement on varna-ashrama dharma, and to also follow his counsel on this: what three centuries of British scholars couldn't decipher shouldn't be burdened on 6<sup>th</sup> graders either!

I hope you will kindly keep these key elements of the big picture in mind in order to produce a more truthful template for future generations of students. In the present form, even with the small improvements in the 2015 draft, students are likely to still get the opposite of this picture: ancient India is one big empty space, with one civilization of buildings in Indus Valley, a nomadic and violent cult invades (or even "migrates") and imposes Hinduism which is nothing more than caste and gender discrimination, and then nothing much happens in India, no zero is discovered, no astronomy, no geometry, no medicine and surgery, no architecture, no literature, no sculpture, no global trade and cultural expansion, no legacy to the modern world at all beyond being irredeemable savages. That is your present story, and it is not the reality of the past or the present.

India is the second most populated country in the world. India is the seventh biggest country in the world. Indians have been here and a part of American life for almost two generations now. Indian Americans are Americans too. You have it in your hands now to do something better, and earn the gratitude of generations of future students and teachers and parents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Vamsee Juluri". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Vamsee" and last name "Juluri" clearly distinguishable.

Vamsee Juluri, Ph. D.

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